Michael J. FROST, *The Spirit, Indigenous Peoples, and Social Change. Maori and a Pentecostal Theology of Social Engagement*

Leyde, Brill, 2019, 309 p.

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- 1 This book seeks to elaborate a Pentecostal theology of social engagement based on religious experiences of the Pentecostal Maori in Aotearoa (New Zealand). Historically, Pentecostalism has been reluctant to engage with systematic injustice and social inequalities or to promote political solutions to social problems. This religious movement prefers to focus on conversion, church development, spiritual warfare, and personal empowerment by the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the book seeks to “prompt discussion regarding Pentecostal theologies vis-à-vis the challenges facing indigenous and other ‘subaltern’ or ‘fourth world’ peoples in the West” (p. 10). After synthesizing a nuanced and well-informed discussion on how social science has characterized Global Pentecostalism – including the Pentecostal Full Gospel which is the focus of this book –, Michael Frost discusses the ways in which Pentecostals engage with theology. Instead of looking for a set of doctrinal statements and biblical interpretations, Frost argues that Pentecostals use Spirit baptism and conversion to develop their theological discourses in relation to the cultural-linguistic framework in which they evolve.
- 2 Methodologically, Michael Frost elaborates his analysis based on interviews of ten Pentecostal leaders that he puts in dialogue with scholarly research on Global

Pentecostalism. While his inquiry borrows methodological insights from social science, it is not a typical ethnography of Maori Pentecostals since the data is limited to what church leaders think of Pentecostalism. The book acts as a careful theological elaboration that stands as a discursive reality proposed by a professional theologian in response to statements delivered by Church leaders, to concerns about injustice and culture, and to theological propositions elaborated by renowned theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann and Amos Yong.

- 3 Based on his interviews, Frost notes that “experiences of the Spirit were connected to a profound affirmation of the participants’ ethnic and cultural identity as Maori” (p. 234). While recalling how identities and social positioning are lived as realities that are constantly evolving, the author underscores how restoring Maori identity is perceived by Pentecostals as the fundamental issue to solve. Restoring this identity is perceived as the first step to engage with other social problems such as unemployment, poverty, health, etc. Consequently, Frost shows that Pentecostalism transforms believers’ stand to the world around them (p. 265), because it helps to reassert their cultural identity and impacts their relations to social realities and difficulties. By highlighting this cultural empowerment, Frost demonstrates how Pentecostal theology cannot be reduced to any *sola scriptura* or a singular religious experience but is equally rooted in the individual voices and culturally informed experiences of the Maori Pentecostals.
- 4 A first paradox of the book is that although the analysis provides a careful presentation of the historical background and the current socio-political context (chap. 4) that impact the life of the Maori in which Pentecostals position themselves (chap. 5), little is said about their religious environment. Religiously, New Zealand is extremely diverse, and Pentecostal churches are evolving among many and larger Christian traditions. Thus, the ways other denominations respond to social problems and engage with ethnic identity may impact how Pentecostals position themselves. In other words, their theology may not be self-made only. One may wonder whether the interreligious coexistence surrounding them informs their theology of social engagement.
- 5 A second interesting paradox lays between the author’s interest in social issues and his methodological approach. While Frost calls for further investigation on Pentecostal materiality – as a way to revisit understandings of the prosperity gospel (p. 252) – the reader is left without much data to apprehend concrete aspects of those religious communities. Which kind of rituals do they promote or banish? How do they collect and share resources? In other words, since the inquiry is limited to interviews of Church leaders, the analysis remains mostly at a discursive level and little is said about the material facets of their religious life. This raises the question of the nature of theology. To what extent this discipline is a discursive reality only? What about practical and material aspects of religious expressions that silently deploy and balance theological views? Engaging with the material turn of religious studies – or with older Jean and John Comaroff’s studies – could help to carry further discussions on the land – a material reality at the core of the deprivation of the Maori by the colonizer – or on the notion of the Crown – a distinctive object reshaping ways in which people rely on material objects, belonging, and sovereignty.